



# VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

## Terms & Conditions

### Hebrews 13:17–19

Tim Badal | May 9, 2021



Let's turn our attention to Hebrews 13. We've been in a series we've entitled, "Jesus: Greatest of All Time." It has been an incredible series; so much so that during the 8:00 service this morning, the last pages of the book of Hebrews fell out of my Bible. You know you're preaching it when your Bible starts falling apart. So the passage I'm reading from almost flew away from me midway through the service. That's quite a reminder that we've been in this book for some time. We have been seeking to understand it and know it in a way that would make us greater followers of Christ, and in doing so, that we would endure and persevere even amidst the trials and tribulations that are all around us.

Remember, during the time of the Hebrews, persecution and difficulties were occurring. As the writer closes out this letter, this sermon, he tells the church they need to act a certain way. In our passage this morning, Hebrews 13:17–19, we are given a two-way message. It's a message that will preach to the leaders of the church and a message that's going to preach to the congregation.

I'm going to put these messages under the heading, "Terms and Conditions." You may not be aware of this, but the phrase "terms and conditions" is everywhere around us. When we get a new app on our phone, there are terms and conditions. When we buy a phone, there are terms and conditions. When we buy an extended warranty or any type of legal transaction, there are inevitably terms and conditions that define the contract between the manufacturer and the purchaser.

If you're like me, you'll probably only read the first couple lines, then you come across the first Latin word or some other legalese and you give up. You start scrolling as quickly as you can to get down to the part where it says, "I agree." You can't say you decline it. Why not? Because it doesn't let you go any farther. So you inevitably have to agree.

Now, skimming it is fine in that moment, but where terms and conditions become important is when problems arise. That's when we go back to the contract and ask, "If I cracked my phone, will the manufacturer replace it? If the motor goes out on the refrigerator, does my extended warranty cover that?" You see, when problems arise, the terms and conditions are vitally important, because we want to know how we're supposed to respond.

In our passage this morning we find the terms and conditions for the church—first for the church leaders, then for the church congregation. When the church is going well, nobody cares about the terms and conditions. That is, when the church feels like its leaders are doing what is right and good, they're fine. It's all good when they're in agreement. But what happens when the church leaders or the church congregation start doing things the other group doesn't like? Then the question is: what are we going to do?

The writer says we need terms and conditions, because at the moment he's writing this, the church is experiencing significant calamity. There are a lot of pressures on them.

Because the congregation is becoming more and more impatient with the struggles and issues they're facing, they may not give the leadership the ability to rule and lead them. Maybe the leaders are being beat up or even incarcerated for their faith. Maybe they're losing their patience working with people who are unwilling to endure and persevere for the cause of Christ. So as he's closing out this letter, the author gives the readers terms and conditions that are to be applied when problems arise. Here's what he says:

<sup>17</sup> Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. <sup>18</sup> Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. <sup>19</sup> I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.

As we talk about the dynamics of the church leaders and the church, we need to realize that in any church the members exist on a spectrum. So I'm going to deal with two extremes. The first extreme within churches is what I want to call "congregational anarchy," that is, every person for themselves. It isn't that the congregation is going to vote on things. We see in the Scriptures that people got together and cast their affirmation for a certain decision that would affect the church. "It seemed good to them," the book of Acts says in a couple different places, speaking of the church.

What I'm talking about is that this is the time of Judges when "everybody did what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 17:6; Proverbs 21:2).

There are a lot of churches in our country, and maybe throughout the world, where the church is not led by one person. It's led by all the people. That is, they just do their own thing. Now, the way you recognize this type of church is that they're going to have contentious church meetings. Any time the church gets together, you're going to white-knuckle it, because people are going to be angry. They're going to be vocal. They're going to yell. They're going to be disappointed with anyone who is leading in a way they're not okay with.

Another thing you're going to see is short leadership tenures. That is, their elders or pastors are going to serve just short times. Did you know the average pastorate for a church in America is 18–24 months? That's a short amount of time. That's an indicator that there are some unhealthy churches in our midst. Either the leaders are being voted out or they're resigning, to get away from the anarchy that is in their midst.

On the other side of the spectrum, the other extreme is what I would call the "celebrity attraction model" of leadership. We see a lot of this in America. We follow certain leaders, whether through podcasts or on television or the radio. It seems they're more about themselves and their persona than they are about honoring God and serving His people. This can go to crazy extremes. There's a website, I think it's called "Preachers and Sneakers," that shows preachers who are wearing thousands of dollars' worth of shoes and bling. Then they talk about the thousands of dollars' worth of watches. [By the way, I'm wearing Skechers and an \$85 Fossil watch, just so you know.] Many times these pastors have no involvement with the congregation. Many times they're in a back room, which is called the "green room," where they have buffets and all that kind of thing set up. Then they walk out on stage, do what they do, then they walk back off the stage. We've got to be careful of these things. These are dysfunctions that are antithetical to biblical ecclesiology.

First of all, God did not envision for His pastors to be walked all over and for everybody to leave the church. He called pastors to equip and lead the church. Likewise, He did not call them to become celebrities who are more about their own persona than the ministry of the church. I hope you don't think we're either of those extremes. I hope we're somewhere in the middle, working through the difficulty of the relationship between the leadership and the laity of the church.

The author seems to indicate that this was a problem in the time of the Hebrews and that's why he gives attention to this subject. He gives words of exhortation and encouragement to both groups of people. Who does he start with? Well, because I'm a bit biased as a pastor and because I know I'm going to be preaching to you what your job is in response to me and my partners in ministry—the elders—I want to start with the leaders because if we do our job well, it will make your job of following, trusting and submitting to us a whole lot easier. So let's start with the pastors.

## **God's terms and conditions for the church involve pastors who willingly and winsomely serve.**

Peppered throughout verses 17–19 are words of exhortation for the pastors. The author knows the pastors are having a tough go at it. He knows they are marked men. Many commentators believe the individuals who are in prison are their pastors. "Remember your pastors who are in prison." Why would the pastors be in prison? If the Jewish leaders of the day wanted to strike fear in the hearts of the people, they would go after the leaders.

We see this today in the house churches in China. Very rarely do you hear of parishioners being put in prison in China. What you hear about is church leaders and elders, those who have been identified as the leaders of the church, being put in prison and given ill treatment.

By the way, at Village we use the word pastor and elder synonymously. There are some who are in full-time or part-time ministry as pastors, plus we have about 25 elders who serve alongside us here at the Sugar Grove campus, shepherding the people of the church.

The author is saying, "No matter how hard it is to be a pastor, it doesn't give you the right to do ministry your way." Now, that's an important truth in light of what we're seeing in the stats regarding pastors. [Christianity Today](#) did a recent survey of pastors across America. These were their findings:

- 70% of pastors say they feel grossly underpaid.
- 90% of pastors say that ministry was completely different from what they thought it would be when they entered ministry.
- 70% of pastors fight depression continually.
- 50% feel so discouraged that they would leave the ministry if they could, but they have no other way of making a living.
- 80% believe pastoral ministry has negatively affected their families.
- 80% of spouses feel the pastor is overworked; they themselves feel left out and under-appreciated by church members.
- 70% of pastors do not have someone they would consider a close friend within the church.
- 40% of pastors report serious conflict with a parishioner in their churches at least once a month.

Now, I bring this up to share the state of the church. There's no doubt these kinds of statistics may explain why the average tenure of a pastor is 18–24 months.

I want to stop and say everything I've heard anecdotally and empirically through a survey we do with our staff and our pastors—none of this is true here at Village Bible Church. You have done the job God has called you to do, so you are not going to hear me beating you up for not doing what you need to. I'll be honest with you. If there is work that needed to be done, I would give it to you. But in this area, you have gone above and beyond. One of the ways you can see it is that our average tenure is not 18–24 months, but closer to a decade or longer. That is a telltale sign that the pastors and elders of your church love to serve you, because you've made their job a joy and not a burden.

So the author says, "Whether it's going well, Village Bible Church, or not, the pastors have three things they are called to live out." But before I get to those three things, he says in verse 17, "*Obey your leaders...*" This is important. Within New Testament ecclesiology—the way we do church—leadership involves two things. Number one, it is plural. Notice, "*Obey your leaders....*" Not leader, but leaders. Everywhere in the New Testament that speaks of elders, it always speaks in the plural. God has intended for elders—plural—to lead the church. This helps with two things. First, it prevents one individual from allowing his whims, ideas and desires to carry the day. By having a team of people, it takes away the ability for one person's prerogatives to carry the day.

The second is that a plurality of leaders enables the leaders to share the load together. One individual would never be able to handle the ministry of even a small church with all the needs, issues, and struggles that inevitably come in the life of the church. So God has intended leaders, in the plural, to serve.

Leadership is not only plural; it is also pastoral. Notice that the text says these are individuals who are "*keeping watch over your souls.*" The idea here is that they're shepherding you. In a biblical church, the leaders are not simply a board of directors. They're not guys who simply crunch the numbers. They're not individuals who simply set the programs. At the heart of every elder must be the people. They must long and love to be with the people of God. They must care and be concerned about the spiritual wellbeing of the people. They should be praying for the people, serving the people, ministering to the people. If you are an elder or a leader in the church, at the heart of it you have to be a lover of people.

So what is this plural and pastoral leadership to do?

### **Pastoral leadership seeks to live honorably at all times.**

First and foremost, the author says, they must seek so live honorable lives at all times. The author says in verse 18, "*Pray for us [leaders], for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things.*" The leaders are saying, "We need you to pray for us, specifically about our character. If we don't have character, then we have no reason to lead."

One of the reasons why men who serve as elders need to have character is because of what it says in Hebrews 13:7. We are called to examine and emulate the lives of those who lead us. When I teach the Word of God, it's easy for me to preach the Bible to you. "Do this, do that, honor God, don't fall into sin..." But what is really hard is to live what I've just told you to do. Like you, I'm not a perfect person. I've got sin. I've got difficulties. I have temptations. And I have the extra pressure of having the job of telling everybody what the Bible says, so now I have to make sure I live by it. When I'm angry, I've got to live according to what I've preached. When I'm sad, I've got to do it. When people are my enemies, I've got to do it. When I'm filled with temptation to be prideful, I need to do it. So you aren't to just listen to what your leaders preach, but you are to imitate them—and as you do that, you become more like Christ. My hope and prayer is that you're able to do that.

The author says, "Pray for us as leaders, because we believe we have a clear conscience." The idea is that they have done well in the past. There's nothing lingering in their past that they're afraid will come to the surface. They have lived honorable lives.

Anytime we talk about bringing on new elders and the qualifications they must have, one thing we talk about is that they must be above reproach. While the qualifications for eldership are present-tense qualifications, there has to be a period in the past during which that person has proven themselves. In fact, the Bible says to be careful not to lay hands too quickly upon a man, because there may be issues you haven't examined yet. You want to watch that person for a period of time. So the author is saying, "We believe we have a clear conscience. Our pasts are clean."

Number two, we need a clear conscience in the present. We must act honorably in all things. Literally, this means in all ways and at all times. Elders should not look good just on Sundays. They aren't to look biblical and spiritual only when the church people are around. In 1 Timothy 3:1 and in Titus, one of the qualifications of an elder is that they are well thought of by outsiders. This means when Pastor Tim is out catering, his customers and his employees should not be able to say, "You get one Tim on Sunday, but we get a very different Tim Monday through Saturday."

Elders should act honorably in all ways and at all times. You need to be praying for your elders in this way. Elders, you need to be desiring to live in this way.

### **Pastoral leadership shows humility because they are accountable.**

Now, wait a minute. We're going to be told that we need to obey and submit to these guys; what keeps these guys from going off the rails?" The writer says they will give an account. That is, on the day of judgment—when you stand before God as a non-leader—you're going to give an account for yourself, but I'll be standing behind you and will give an account for myself. Then you'll get to go on to heaven. Then God will say, "Now Tim, go to the second line." I will have given an account for myself in the first line, but then I have to go over to another line where I'll stand with the elders of Village Bible Church. In that line, I'm going to give an account as to how I took care of God's flock. God is going to ask me, "Did the flock grow? Were they fed?"

This is speculation, but I'm going to believe that Psalm 23 is going to be applied. "Did you shepherd the flock as I was a Shepherd to you?" I think the words of Jesus to Peter will apply: "Did you feed My sheep? Did you tend My lambs? Did you do the work of keeping the flock where I needed them to be?" The Bible says every elder is going to endure that second line of questioning.

James 3:1 warns, "Not all of you should be teachers," and you could add the word "leaders" to that, "because you will be under a stricter judgment." I don't know exactly what that looks like, but I've got to be honest. That should strike some level of fear and sobriety into the heart of each elder before he thinks he can lead just anyway he wants.

### **Pastoral leadership seizes opportunities to hang around the flock.**

The final thing we see in order for us to live honorable lives and to show humility is that we are to seize opportunities to hang around the flock. The author writes, "I want you to pray for something very specifically." In Hebrews 13:19 he urges them to pray "*...more earnestly...that I may be restored to you...*" He wants to get to them as quickly as possible. The idea here is that the author loves to be with the people.

As I said in the first point, at the very heart of their role, elders love people. They love to be with the people. That means most of our elders are leaders of small groups. What you should not hear your elder say is, "Ah, I guess we have to do this again. I could have found a lot of other things to do on a Tuesday night." No, an elder says, "There's no greater joy than to have you with me today, to open God's Word, to pray for you, to lead and guide you. How can I serve you?" You see this overwhelming joy. But

remember, the author who says, “I want to be with you; pray for me,” has just finished a 13-chapter letter exuding love and affection by teaching and guiding these people. This is what it means to be an elder.

So, elders here today, how are you at doing these things? How are you doing at living honorably when nobody else is watching? How much humility is there? Are you starting to read your own press? Are you starting to believe things about yourself that aren't true? How are you doing at seizing opportunities to be with people? Are you hospitable? Are you open to conversations with people, even if it means changing things on your calendar? At Village Bible Church, we need good solid leaders who do these things willingly and winsomely. Your job is to serve.

Now I'm going to take the lead pastor out of this, but I want to say that our elders are phenomenal. Amen? They love you guys. They care for you. They and their wives seek to serve you. Are they perfect? No. Do they have areas where they can grow? Absolutely. We challenge that and work with that. But I am so glad to be part of a team of leaders who love Jesus and who love you.

Now, as they lead and serve, what are the terms and conditions for the people?

## **God's terms and conditions for the church involve people who willingly and winsomely submit.**

The leaders' job is to serve; the people's job is to submit. Everyone just got the willies, right? “I don't like that word. We're Americans. Don't tread on me is our mantra.” We bring that into the church. There's a disclaimer that needs to be made when we talk about submission that applies to any area where we're called to obey and submit. It's true in the church world, where the congregation is to submit to the leaders. It's true of wives, who are called to submit to their husbands. It's true for children who are called to obey their parents. It's true in the workplace when it tells slaves to obey their earthly masters.

Anywhere there is this dichotomy of leading and following, there's an inevitable time when we need to stop and ask, “What happens if the leader asks me to do something I don't think is right?” The Bible tells us that even within the government world, we first have to honor and obey God before we obey or submit to any earthly leadership. This might be a husband, a parent, a boss or the church leaders.

You are to obey and submit to your church leaders as they faithfully obey and submit to God. The author is not creating a cult here, where anything Pastor Tim or the other pastors and elders say in any situation goes. There have been a lot of instances when pastors have been given total control of people's lives—who they can be friends with, who they are to marry, how they spend their money, where they can go. We've even seen in some cultic groups that the leader makes the decision on when they will all die. Of course, these are excesses that are completely and utterly out of bounds within the church context.

So as your leaders lead faithfully, obeying and trusting and submitting to God, the call to the congregation is to follow. It's to obey them. Now, “obey and submit” is an outside-inside thing. Obey is outward conformity. “I'll do what they say, but I hate their guts.” That's obeying. We obey laws, but we might not do it because we think they're good laws. We obey them outwardly. Submitting is from the heart. Submitting says, “I'm going to obey what they say because I believe them to be good men. I believe they want to honor God. I believe I've been called to do this. I'm obeying out of a reverence for Christ.”

Some of us obey outwardly, then we get in the car and lay into our leaders. “Those fools. Those idiots. Those dummies. I can't believe they do that. Can you believe they made that decision?” But then when you're talking face to face with the leader, “Yeah, that's great, Pastor. That's wonderful.” We need to make sure our obeying and submitting are one and the same, with our whole being following.

### **This means doing what your leaders say.**

So what does this mean? First of all, it means doing what your leaders say. It doesn't take a Greek scholar to understand what obeying and submitting looks like. Where this comes into play is when your elders make decisions. Now remember, it's not one person making a decision; it's a group of individuals who have all been elected by the members of our church with an approval of 75% or higher. It's a super majority.

As representatives of the people, the elders have made a decision about a particular situation. If it doesn't contradict God and His Word, your calling is to follow them in that. It doesn't mean you don't give feedback or even constructive criticism. It does mean you need to have a spirit that's willing to follow, even if it goes against your preferences or desires.

### **This means letting them supervise.**

The second thing we see is that once we do what the leaders say, we then pivot and let them supervise. Notice it says in verse 17 that their job is "...*keeping watch over your souls...*" That's an altogether personal thing. Now, does that mean every elder or pastor should do that? No, only the ones to whom you've said, "You are my elder, you are my pastor" have been given the right to be involved in your life.

As a pastor, I've been involved in a lot of very delicate and difficult situations because those individuals have invited me in. I've talked with people about very intimate details of their lives. Now, what they need to know about me is I'm not going to talk about it with other people. I'm not going to make it an opportunity to judge them. I am going to pray for them and counsel them.

Now, what the writer is saying is that in order for them to keep watch over your souls, to be the "night watchman" in your life, you've got to let them in. To see what that means, let's use the doctor illustration. You go to the doctor who says, "How are you doing?" "Well, I hurt." "Oh really? I'm here to help. What hurts?" "I can't tell you." "Where are your pains?" "I'm not going to say." How in the world are you going to have the doctor help you unless you start sharing some of your symptoms? After you open up to the doctor and he says, "This is what you have to do in order to be healed," do you say, "You don't know what you're talking about, Doctor. That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard. I'm outta here."

Can I tell you how many times I've shared a word of wisdom with someone who's invited me in, but then their response is, "You're crazy; I don't need to hear that"?

A good healthy church will let their trusted leaders in, allowing them to give wisdom and godly counsel. They'll say, "You know what? I'm going to take that under advisement. You've given me advice, so now I'm going to seek the Lord. I'm not going to throw it out, but will pray about what you've told me."

We as leaders need the ability to supervise and watch over your souls. The reason why is that one day we're going to give an account for what we've done.

### **This means following them, which brings great satisfaction to all.**

Finally, we need to be able to follow our leaders, because it brings great satisfaction to all. When the church follows its leaders, it's a beautiful thing.

Not too long ago I was watching a group of geese in which the goslings were following their mom. She was literally walking them across a busy intersection, squawking at them: "We've got to go! We've got to go! We're in trouble here." What did they do? The little geese followed her. There's something beautiful when that happens.

The Bible says that when this happens with us, it will be to our advantage. Good things will come from it. When leaders lead well and the church follows those leaders, everything will flow in the direction it needs to. I'm here to tell you, that's what happens here at Village Bible Church. That's why we're seeing such growth. That's why we're seeing the health. I believe we've got healthy leaders and healthy congregants.

## **Three steps of action for everyone**

Now, how do we keep this going? How do we keep what I believe we've got here?

### **Pray for each other.**

The author says, "Pray for us." Congregants, pray for your pastors. Pray for your elders. Take time and lift them up, so we will not fall into disrepute. Pray, pray, pray. Pray for our families. Pray for our outside work and all we do. Pray for us. And elders, continue the work I know we're doing of praying for our congregants.

## Do your part well.

We each have a part to play. We need to not say, “Well, the elders need to get better at what they’re doing, then I’ll start following when that happens.” Likewise, the elders can’t say, “We’ve got a bunch of stiff-necked people. I’ll start leading well when they start following well.”

If you’re an elder today, do what the elders have been called to do. If you’re a congregant today, focus in on what God has called you to do. Both groups, do your part well so God will honor it.

## Serve Christ as partners.

Go back to the headings of our points today. Notice that both of us have to be willing and winsome in our jobs. This is what God has called us to—and here’s why. If we really believe that Jesus is the greatest of all time, then surely our church will look so much different from the world around us. So let us make every effort to follow Christ, follow our leaders, serve Christ and serve those who follow us—to the glory of God.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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